



Introduction: Special issue on the coproduction of public services

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This introductory article discusses the topic of coproduction and outlines the special issue. In particular, we explain some different uses of the concept of coproduction, outline our focus on coproduction as the collaboration between public service agents and citizen-users in the provision of public services, and contextualize coproduction, specifically looking at the legal context in which coproduction takes places. We then portray the international collaboration that has been set up within the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS) Study Group on Coproduction of Public Services. Next, we highlight the included articles and explain what they teach us about coproduction and what we must still learn.

Coproduction of public services

‘Coproduction’ refers to the involvement of both citizens and public sector professionals in the delivery of public services. Although countries differ in the extent to which citizens play a role in the provision of public services, the idea of coproduction is gaining ground around the world. Financial crises, austerity in public finances, and growing doubts about the legitimacy of both the public sector and the market have led numerous governments to involve and cooperate with citizens and civil society in the production of public services. However, despite the growing scholarly interest in the coproduction of public services, practice is still leading both theory and research, and there is a continuous need to bring together theoretical insights and empirical data to enable a better understanding of public service coproduction. The goal for this special IRAS issue is to shed light on the current theory, research, and practice of coproduction. Specifically, this special issue

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examines the ideological and normative stances about the role of government that shape the debate on coproduction, and provides much-needed empirical research on the participants and impacts of coproduction. The special issue not only provides a broad overview of settings (Western and non-Western) and policy sectors in which coproduction takes place, but also discusses crucial issues relating to the changing roles of professionals and coproducers, accountability, and the effects of coproduction both for the individuals and for the organizations involved.

We can refer to coproduction as:

the mix of activities that both public service agents and citizens contribute to the provision of public services. The former are involved as professionals, or 'regular producers', while 'citizen production' is based on voluntary efforts by individuals and groups to enhance the quality of the services they use. (Brandsen et al., 2012: 1; based on Parks et al., 1981)

Crucial in this definition is that in coproduction, both citizens and the government are involved, thereby distinguishing coproduction both from government services without active citizen involvement and from citizen self-organization. However, conceptual and definitional issues on coproduction stand out whenever coproduction scholars meet. For example, scholars differ in either using a strict definition that limits coproduction to the service delivery phase or referring to service users being part of service planning, delivery, monitoring, and/or evaluation. In this special issue, we adhere to the latter, open view on coproduction, including all forms of collaboration between public service agents and citizen-users in the provision of public services through the different phases of public service delivery.

International collaboration

The articles presented in this special issue result from international collaboration within the context of the IIAS Study Group on Coproduction of Public Services. Under the auspices of the IIAS, the authors of this introduction initiated the study group with the aim of creating and nurturing an intellectual platform for the theoretical discussion and empirical analysis of coproduction and its implications for the organization and management of public services. The study group's first meeting at the Leiden University campus, The Hague, The Netherlands, in 2013 brought together scholars from the US, Europe, and Africa to explore innovations in public service delivery that include involving citizens in the production of public services. All articles in this special issue were presented and discussed at the 'The Hague meeting'.

Contributions to this special issue

The special issue is divided into three parts. Part I, 'Setting the Stage for Coproduction', consists of this introduction and a first article, by Mariafrancesca

Sicilia, Enrico Guarini, Alessandro Sancino, Martino Andreani, and Renato Ruffini. In this article, the authors establish the context for the study of coproduction. It outlines how the provision of public services has been reformed over the last decades, prompting more governments to consider coproduction as a tool for public service delivery. The theoretical discussion is illustrated with a study of the coproduction of services for autistic children in the Lombardy Region of Italy that analyses the phenomenon of coproduction, references all the stages of the service cycle, and examines its multi-level governance context.

Part II of the special issue focuses on a specific and important gap in our knowledge: what motivates citizen engagement in coproduction? This question is seldom studied empirically, yet knowing citizen motivations can help us better understand who does and does not take part in coproduction and why, and thereby help us improve processes for recruiting citizen coproducers. This section includes four articles that separately examine individual attributes, group behaviors, and neighborhood characteristics.

Carola Van Eijk and Trui Steen mix theoretical insights and empirical evidence on citizens' motivations for coproducing public services. Their article brings together different strands of literature to develop a theoretical framework for explaining how citizens' characteristics and capacities impact their motivations to engage in coproduction. Unlike other studies that focus on collaborative networks, processes, and organizations, this article argues that the individual characteristics of citizens are likely to strongly affect their engagement in coproduction processes. The article empirically tests the framework using data from focus group discussions in four different cases, involving health care, education, and neighborhood watches in the Netherlands and Belgium.

In their contribution, Tony Bovaird, Gerry Stoker, Tricia Jones, Elke Loeffler, and Monica Pinilla Roncancio note that previous research suggests a paradox, and consequently a significant barrier, for citizen involvement in coproduction. Citizens are more likely to engage in coproduction when the actions involved are relatively easy and can be carried out individually rather than in groups. Yet, many of the potential pay-offs from coproduction come from group-based, rather than individual, activities. This article explores theoretically the roots of collective coproduction and both the incentives to encourage it and the barriers likely to impede it. The article uses survey data and experimental methods to explore various intervention strategies for promoting collective coproduction behaviors. It concludes with a discussion of implications for how local governance mechanisms can influence citizens toward more collective coproduction.

Next, Joost Fledderus and Marlies Honingh study the involvement of coproducers in employment programs. The unemployed are no longer passive beneficiaries of public services; rather, they are expected to play an active role in becoming job-ready. Thus, many labor policies require unemployment recipients to assume responsibility and get involved with re-employment programs. However, such programs have been suspected of 'cherry-picking' participants who have the greatest likelihood of quickly reintegrating into the labor market. This article empirically

examines the issue of selection bias in a work activation program in the Netherlands. Specifically, the article adds to the discussion on motivations for coproduction since it examines the motivation, trust, and perceived control of participants and, specifically, compares the characteristics of both participants and non-participants to determine whether such cherry-picking occurs. It emphasizes the importance of trust in motivating coproduction.

In contrast to studying individual characteristics or group behaviors, Peter Thijssen and Wouter Van Dooren examine the role of neighborhood-level variables in explaining citizens' participation in the coproduction of public services. Specifically, the article hypothesizes that the characteristics of where one lives determine the levels of coproduction in a community. Thijssen and Van Dooren test this hypothesis using a data set from a local initiative in Antwerp, Belgium, where citizens report public works problems to the local government. They examine a nested configuration of both individual and neighborhood variables in a multi-level, multivariate analysis. The results suggest that local coproduction is, in part, a function of complex interactions among spatial, structural, and socio-demographic variables.

The third and final part of this special issue contains a series of four case studies that examine coproduction in different policy contexts and countries, including: campus safety in the US; victim–offender mediation in Finland; health care in the Netherlands; and health care and education in Uganda.

Brian Williams, Megan LePere-Schloop, P. Daniel Silk, and Alexandra Hebdon provide a case study of coproducing campus safety and security at the University of Georgia. Recent events in the US have elevated the salience of university safety, yet little is known about the efforts and difficulties of coproducing campus security. This article explores the challenges of coproduction for campus safety professionals, and the capacity and willingness of students to engage in the coproduction of campus security. Specifically, the authors examine how police officers find ways to meaningfully interact with students, faculty, and staff, and analyze the characteristics that distinguish students who are more active in coproducing campus safety and security from those who are less active service recipients.

Sanna Tuurnas, Jari Stenvall, and Pasi-Heikki Rannisto provide a case study of the use of coproduction in restorative justice services in Finland. Specifically, they examine the use of conciliation (also known as victim–offender mediation), a process wherein volunteer mediators offer criminal offenders and their victims the opportunity to determine restitution and compensation without court proceedings. The case provides insight about how coproduction changes the roles played by professionals and citizens and how coproduction changes the working culture of public service professions. It specifically highlights issues of street-level responsibilities and accountability.

Recent research suggests that the involvement of both patients and staff in health services improves the quality of care. The article by Femke Vennik, Hester van de Bovenkamp, Kim Putters, and Kor Grit provides more insight into mechanisms for involving health-care recipients through a qualitative case study about how five hospitals in the Netherlands have used coproduction in health services. Specifically, the

article uses data from document analysis, observations, and interviews to study the motives for and experiences with these processes of coproduction, as well as to assess the impacts of coproduction on quality improvement and patient empowerment.

The final article, by Mary Wenene, Trui Steen, and Mark Rutgers, examines coproduction in the health and education sectors in Uganda and focuses on civil servants' views of the role played by public service recipients. Specifically, using interview and survey data, the article finds that more effective service delivery cannot take root unless it is translated into a culture that supports the building of state capacity at all levels, including at the community and individual recipient levels. However, due to a number of contradictions about citizen roles in the Ugandan context, service recipients are not yet adequately engaged in the demand for and delivery of quality public services.

Concluding remarks

This special issue confirms the relevance of the work of the IIAS International Study Group on Coproduction of Public Services, but also highlights the need for further research on a range of issues, for example: conceptual and definitional issues in coproduction; connections between the coproduction and 'mainstream' public administration literature, as well as literature in other disciplines (multidisciplinary issues); comparative research on coproduction in different jurisdictions; the further development of frameworks, theories, and models for understanding and implementing coproduction; the location of coproduction in the service chain and in the policy cycle; and the relationship between the design of coproduction services and outcomes at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of public governance. The nature of the subject requires a clear focus on linking theory and practice.

References

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